

RBS and RUS, USDA

§ 4284.942

(a) *When to submit.* Complete applications must be received by the Agency on or before the application deadline established for a fiscal year to be considered for funding for that fiscal year. Applications received by the Agency after the application deadline established for a fiscal year will not be considered.

(b) *Incomplete applications.* Incomplete applications will be rejected. Applicants will be informed of the elements that made the application incomplete. If a resubmitted application is received by the applicable application deadline, the Agency will reconsider the application.

(c) *Where to submit.* All applications must be submitted to the State Office of Rural Development in the State where the project primarily takes place, or on-line through grants.gov.

(d) *Format.* Applications may be submitted as paper copy, or electronically via grants.gov. If submitted as paper copy, only one original copy should be submitted. An application submission must contain all required components in their entirety. Emailed or faxed submissions will not be acknowledged, accepted or processed by the Agency.

(e) *Other forms and instructions.* Upon request, the Agency will make available to the public the necessary forms and instructions for filing applications. These forms and instructions may be obtained from any State Office of Rural Development, or the Agency's Value-Added Producer Grant program Web site in <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm>.

§§ 4284.934–4284.939 [Reserved]

PROCESSING AND SCORING APPLICATIONS

§ 4284.940 Processing applications.

(a) *Initial review.* Upon receipt of an application on or before the application submission deadline for each fiscal year, the Agency will conduct a review to determine if the applicant and project are eligible, and if the application is complete and sufficiently responsive to program requirements.

(b) *Notifications.* After the review in paragraph (a) of this section has been conducted, if the Agency has determined that either the applicant or project is ineligible or that the applica-

tion is not complete to allow evaluation of the application or sufficiently responsive to program requirements, the Agency will notify the applicant in writing and will include in the notification the reason(s) for its determination(s).

(c) *Resubmittal by applicants.* Applicants may submit revised applications to the Agency in response to the notification received under paragraph (b) of this section. If a revised grant application is received on or before the application deadline, it will be processed by the Agency. If a revised application is not received by the specified application deadline, the Agency will not process the application and will inform the applicant that their application was not reviewed due to tardiness.

(d) *Subsequent ineligibility determinations.* If at any time an application is determined to be ineligible, the Agency will notify the applicant in writing of its determination.

§ 4284.941 Application withdrawal.

During the period between the submission of an application and the execution of award documents, the applicant must notify the Agency in writing if the project is no longer viable or the applicant no longer is requesting financial assistance for the project. When the applicant notifies the Agency, the selection will be rescinded or the application withdrawn.

§ 4284.942 Proposal evaluation criteria and scoring applications.

(a) *General.* The Agency will only score applications for which it has determined that the applicant and project are eligible, the application is complete and sufficiently responsive to program requirements, and the project is likely feasible. Any applicant whose application will not be reviewed because the Agency has determined it fails to meet the preceding criteria will be notified of appeal rights pursuant to § 4284.903. Each such viable application the Agency receives on or before the application deadline in a fiscal year will be scored in the fiscal year in which it was received. Each application will be scored based on the information provided and/or adequately referenced

in the scoring section of the application at the time the applicant submits the application to the Agency. Scoring information must be readily identifiable in the application or it will not be considered.

(b) *Scoring Applications.* The criteria specified in paragraphs (b)(1) through (b)(6) of this section will be used to score all applications. For each criterion, applicants must demonstrate how the project has merit, and provide rationale for the likelihood of project success. Responses that do not address all aspects of the criterion, or that do not comprehensively convey pertinent project information will receive lower scores. The maximum number of points that will be awarded to an application is 100. Points may be awarded lump sum or on a graduated basis. The Agency application package will provide additional instruction to assist applicants when responding to the criteria below.

(1) *Nature of the Proposed Venture (graduated score 0–30 points).* Describe the technological feasibility of the project, of the project, as well as the operational efficiency, profitability, and overall economic sustainability resulting from the project. In addition, demonstrate the potential for expanding the customer base for the value-added product, and the expected increase in revenue returns to the producer-owners providing the majority of the raw agricultural commodity to the project. Applications that demonstrate high likelihood of success in these areas will receive more points than those that demonstrate less potential in these areas.

(2) *Qualifications of Project Personnel (graduated score 0–20 points).* Identify the individuals who will be responsible for completing the proposed tasks in the work plan, including the roles and activities that owners, staff, contractors, consultants or new hires may perform; and demonstrate that these individuals have the necessary qualifications and expertise, including those hired to do market or feasibility analyses, or to develop a business operations plan for the value-added venture. Include the qualifications of those individuals responsible to lead or manage the total project (applicant

owners or project managers), as well as those individuals responsible for actually conducting the various individual tasks in the work plan (such as consultants, contractors, staff or new hires). Demonstrate the commitment and the availability of any consultants or other professionals to be hired for the project. If staff or consultants have not been selected at the time of application, provide specific descriptions of the qualifications required for the positions to be filled. Applications that demonstrate the strong credentials, education, capabilities, experience and availability of project personnel that will contribute to a high likelihood of project success will receive more points than those that demonstrate less potential for success in these areas.

(3) *Commitments and Support (graduated score 0–10 points).* Producer commitments to the project will be evaluated based on the number of independent producers currently involved in the project; and the nature, level and quality of their contributions. End-user commitments will be evaluated on the basis of potential or identified markets and the potential amount of output to be purchased, as evidenced by letters of intent or contracts from potential buyers referenced within the application. Other Third-Party commitments to the project will be evaluated based on the critical and tangible nature of the contribution to the project, such as technical assistance, storage, processing, marketing, or distribution arrangements that are necessary for the project to proceed; and the level and quality of these contributions. Applications that demonstrate the project has strong direct financial, technical and logistical support to successfully complete the project will receive more points than those that demonstrate less potential for success in these areas.

(4) *Work Plan and Budget (graduated score 0–20 points).* In accord with § 4284.922(b)(5), applicants must submit a comprehensive work plan and budget. The work plan must provide specific and detailed narrative descriptions of the tasks and the key project personnel that will accomplish the project's

RBS and RUS, USDA

§ 4284.951

goals. The budget must present a detailed breakdown of all estimated costs associated with the activities and allocate those costs among the listed tasks. The source and use of both grant and matching funds must be specified for all tasks. An eligible start and end date for the project itself and for individual project tasks must be clearly indicated and may not exceed Agency specified timeframes for the grant period. Points may not be awarded unless sufficient detail is provided to determine that both grant and matching funds are being used for qualified purposes and are from eligible sources without a conflict of interest. It is recommended that applicants utilize the budget format templates provided in the Agency's application package.

(5) *Priority Points (lump sum score 0 or 10 points)*. Priority points may be awarded in both the General Funds competition, as well as the Reserved Funds competitions. Qualifying applicants may request priority points if they meet the requirements for one of the following categories and provide the documentation specified in § 4284.922(d), as applicable. Priority categories include: Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher, Operator of a Small or Medium-sized farm or ranch that is structured as a Family Farm, Mid Tier Value Chain proposals, and Farmer or Rancher Cooperative. It is recommended that applicants utilize the Agency application package when documenting for priority points and refer to the documentation requirements specified in § 4284.922(d). All qualifying applicants in this category will receive 10 points.

(6) *Administrator Priority Categories (graduated score 0–10 points)*. Unless otherwise specified in a notification issued under § 4284.915(b)(1), the Administrator of USDA Rural Development Business and Cooperative Programs has discretion to award up to 10 points to an application to improve the geographic diversity of awardees in a fiscal year.

§§ 4284.943–4284.949 [Reserved]

GRANT AWARDS AND AGREEMENT

§ 4284.950 Award process.

(a) *Selection of applications for funding and for potential funding*. The Agency will select and rank applications for funding based on the score an application has received in response to the proposal evaluation criteria, compared to the scores of other value-added applications received in the same fiscal year. Higher scoring applications will receive first consideration for funding. The Agency will notify applicants, in writing, whether or not they have been selected for funding. For those applicants not selected for funding, the Agency will provide a brief explanation for why they were not selected.

(b) *Ranked applications not funded*. A ranked application that is not funded in the fiscal year in which it was submitted will not be carried forward into the next fiscal year. The Agency will notify the applicant in writing.

(c) *Intergovernmental review*. If State or local governments raise objections to a proposed project under the intergovernmental review process that are not resolved within 90 days of the Agency's award announcement date, the Agency will rescind the award and will provide the applicant with a written notice to that effect. The Agency, in its sole discretion, may extend the 90-day period if it appears resolution is imminent.

§ 4284.951 Obligate and award funds.

(a) *Letter of conditions*. When an application is selected subject to conditions established by the Agency, the Agency will notify the applicant using a Letter of Conditions, which defines the conditions under which the grant will be made. Each grantee will be required to meet all terms and conditions of the award within 90 days of receiving a Letter of Conditions unless otherwise specified by the Agency at the time of the award. If the applicant agrees with the conditions, the applicant must complete, sign, and return the Agency's Form RD 1942-46, "Letter of Intent to Meet Conditions." If the applicant believes that certain conditions cannot